

Argiolus in West Herts. and in Cumbria

By Lt. Col. CHARLES F. COWAN*

The arrival in areas between Tring and Dunstable of *Celastrina argiolus* (L.), the Holly Blue, was reported in 1970 (vol. 82, p. 216). The species was common in spring and late summer for three years, but suffered drastic decline in 1973 and thereafter was not seen before I left the district in June 1975. Reasons for such fluctuations have often been queried but seldom discussed.

The complete disappearance of the insect over a wide area east of Tring, in which I watched earnestly for it for those three years 1973-1975 was quite remarkable. Only about three adults were seen of the spring brood during summer 1973, and three larvae were found on ivy that November—very late. Thereafter, none.

My impression is that the decline in this instance was caused by cold and wind. The butterfly, although tough and resilient and having an extensive holarctic range, is light and frail. It needs warm still days for mating. Such were lacking. Spring and early summer of 1973 were cold, and a gusty wind, usually westerly or sou'west, often blew for days on end. The spring emergence of the adults was very protracted, and as individuals emerged they were carried away before they could mate.

This must be a critical borderline area for *C. argiolus*. The Grand Union Canal here reaches its highest level east of the Severn Basin watershed, just 400 feet. A drop of rain falling here might flow north down Thistle Brook into the Vale of Aylesbury, then west down the Thame to join the Thames ten miles below Oxford; or south down the Bulbourne and the Gade into the Thames at Staines; or north down Whistle Brook and the Ousel to join the Great Ouse at Newport Pagnell, swing east and come out in the Wash. This saddle in the Chilterns watershed may accentuate climatic changes just sufficiently to affect the insect's security of tenure periodically.

Having moved to Cumbria, I was delighted to see *C. argiolus* flying over a considerable area for about three weeks from 10th May, 1976. From here northwards the species is normally single-brooded, so I was astonished to see a specimen outside my back door at Grange-over-Sands on 9th August. This abnormal second brood, which I am reliably told also flew in 1975, was seen frequently during August. Ovipositing was watched on ivy, and larvae nearly full-grown could easily be found in early September. Most had disappeared by 10th September, and one held captive pupated on that date. Localities where the butterfly was watched, and/or the larva seen, are: Ambleside (10-km. sq. 35/30), Allithwaite (34/37), Broughton-in-Furness (34/28), Grange (34/47), Field Broughton, Penny Bridge and Townhead (34/38), and Ulverston (34/27).

*4 Thornfield Terrace, Grange-over-Sands, Cumbria, LA11 7DR.

The glorious summers of 1975 and 1976 no doubt enabled *C. argiolus* to produce these exceptional second broods. The continuous warm and windless weather favoured early mating, and helped the resultant larvae to feed up and pupate remarkably early.

This species is usually said to pupate "underneath a leaf", and in the past I spent many days turning over leaves but gleaning nothing other than dirty spider-webs. The larva, as it reaches the purplish pre-pupa phase, strays from its natal twig, and I suspect, usually drops to the floor unless it finds a comfortable cranny in time. Then it will attach itself to a fallen leaf for pupation. In the wandering stage it is, like *Anthocharis cardamines* (L.), very determined, and one which I held captive in 1971 escaped; to pupate, as I discovered when it emerged next spring, underneath the Grandfather Clock. All others chose one of the detached leaves supplied on the floor of the cage, after prolonged examination. If disturbed, they would shift to another.

OECIACUS HIRUNDINIS JENYNS (HEMIPTERA-HETEROPTERA) IN SOMERSET. — Dr. R. Nash's note (*Ent. Rec.*, 88: 265) on *O. hirundinis* prompts me to record that I found this species quite common in nests of the House Martin taken from Shapwick Manor, nr. Bridgewater, Somerset, in January 1974, with up to 20 in one nest. Masee (*Ent. mon. Mag.*, 1955: 91: 14) does not record this species from Somerset. — H. C. J. GODFREY, Pinehurst West, Swiffe Lane, Broadoak, Heathfield, Sussex.

THE JERSEY TIGER (EUPLAGIA QUDRIPUNCTARIA HBN.). — In his notes on Migrant Lepidoptera in Cornwall in August 1976 (*Ent. Rec.*, 89: 41) Mr. Brian Elliott "assumes" a second generation of the Jersey Tiger. This is a univoltine species with a long imaginal life, during which it migrates and sometimes aestivates (as in Rhodes) until sexually mature in September. As Mr. Elliott suggests, it may have migrated across the Channel or from Devon to the trap at Housel Bay. For further details of its behaviour in N. France see my notes in *Ent. Rec.*, 84: 230-31. — E. P. WILTSHIRE, 140 Marsham Court, Marsham Street, London, SW1 P4JY.

VANESSA ATALANTA L. IN FEBRUARY. — Near Wooton Copse, in the New Forest, about noon on 13th February, 1977, I noted a *Vanessa atalanta* flying weakly just above the ground — presumably it had recently emerged from hibernation. — D. A. LEPARD, Silver Crest, Silver Street, Sway, Lymington, Hants.